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JANUARY - MARCH 2013

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EDITOR'S NOTE

I once read that privation is good for the soul but there's time enough for that when the stomach has no other choice. I think that exactly applies to the month of December. It is hardly the best time to close a sports and fitness magazine. The chances of slipping up on a diet or skipping the gym for the day is much too immense, what with all the Christmas parties, holidays treats, and sweet tidbits the season is famously known for. People, guilt-ridden over the many sweet and calorie-heavy stuff they're scarfing, console themselves with the idea that they will get back to the regimented diet and lifestyle once January kicks in. Well, January is here; excuses won't cut it anymore. This edition of TAGA *Sports* is all about getting back on the saddle again.

Our Q&A subject, Sean Smith, nails the point nicely. Smith gave up running for some eight years to focus on his law studies before getting his groove back, plunging into marathon and triathlon like a natural. The fact that he's been winning medals along the way is just the cherry on top of the sundae. ***See story on Page 8.***

The same holds true for CNMI bowler Ruselle Zapanta, who is on a sort of extended sabbatical from the sport yet managed to reach the quarterfinals of the 26th Asian Intercity Bowling Championships in Penang, Malaysia last October—an unexpected yet welcome news that surprised even the bowler himself. ***Story starts on Page 17.***

A similar theme runs through Mark Rabago's feature on the Commonwealth Football League, which had its last official game nearly seven years ago. The league is trying to revive the sport in the Commonwealth and had its first international experience in November in a match against the Philippine Punishers in Manila. Although they lost that match, the momentum to get the league going is gaining steam and organizers are optimistic of the game's full-blown resurrection. ***See story on Page 18.***

On a tangential note, Roselyn Monroyo's feature on the basics of boxing and Walter Sutherland's story on windsurfing share a similar theme: trying things out for the first time. Roselyn engaged the expertise of Cuki "The Flying Cockroach" Alvarez to learn how to throw an effective punch. Walter, on the other hand, went for water in a bid to learn how to windsurf. ***Stories start on Pages 22 and 26.***

Again, for comments, violent reactions, criticisms, and suggestions for future issues, shoot us an email at editor@saipantribune.com and we'd be sure to consider them for future editions of TAGA *Sports*.

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
editor@saipantribune.com
Editor

COVER ART
CFL Sharks quarterback Josh Lutrell in action against the Philippines Punishers during their historic game last Nov. 10 at the Phil-Sports Complex Track & Field Oval.

Photography by
BOB GUERRERO

TAGA SPORTS

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scoreboard

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The Commonwealth Football League attempts another comeback. MARK RABAGO

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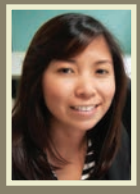
CLARISSA V. DAVID



Dreaming of becoming a dance diva, Clarissa polished her so-called dancing skills during her college days when she took up Street Dance and Ballet classes for P.E. Her most unforgettable dancing experience was performing for a small crowd of university students after a hyperventilation attack. Nowadays, she is still under the (false) impression that she could dance and hopes to try Zumba one day.

ROSELYN MONROYO

After seeing Juan Marquez's "killer" punch against Manny Pacquiao, Roselyn realized why Cuki Alvarez kept reminding her to keep her left hand up (protecting her face) while throwing right punches during a boxing lesson with the "Flying Cockroach." She is waiting for a pair of boxing gloves (definitely not the pink ones) so she can return to Trench Tech gym and work with the bags.

MARK RABAGO

Mark's only dalliance with gridiron football was a pickup game among church mates on a beach in Zambales more than a decade ago. Among NFL teams, he roots for the New England Patriots. He misses covering Super Bowl events on Saipan since being chained to the sports desk.

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND

Walter is approaching his third year at the *Saipan Tribune* this March. In 2012 he had his first round of golf on Saipan and got to witness Tinian's first 100K bike race. He is currently gearing up to cover the Marianas Interscholastic Sports Organization's upcoming events, the CNMI volleyball, and the 2013 Saipan Little League Baseball seasons.

Email letters to the editor to editor@saipantribune.com or mail to PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan MP 96950. Submissions to TAGA *Sports* must include the writer's name, village address (no P.O. boxes), and daytime phone or mobile number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and may be published or used in any medium. All submissions become the property of the publication and will not be returned.

Trophies galore

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Trophies on Saipan come in all shapes and sizes—from the neon-green coconut trophies of the Coconut Tennis Classic, the swinging golfer mementos of the Refaluwasch Golf Association, to the latte stone-shaped wooden keepsakes that NMASA hands out during its annual Athlete of the Year awards.

Awards and trophies have been used to mark outstanding victories since ancient times. According to Mischa Weston-Green's "Brief History of Awards and Trophies," the word trophy was derived from the French trophée in 1513, "a spoil or prize of war," from Latin *trophaeum*, meaning "monument to victory."

In ancient Greece, trophies were made on the battlefields of victorious battles from captured arms and standards, and were hung upon a tree or a large stake made to resemble a warrior, Weston-Green said.

The ancient Romans, she said, kept their trophies much closer to home. They built magnificent trophies in Rome, including columns and arches atop great foundations.

Nowadays, mass production and explosion of sports activities have made trophies as ubiquitous as the various sports they celebrate.

MARKET LEADER

On Saipan, the sale of trophies is dominated by Topnotch, which has been selling the symbols of sports victories and triumphs since the 1990s.

Owner Maru Villanueva said Topnotch started out as a dress boutique but when a company sponsoring a tennis tournament asked for a consignment of trophies for the event sometime in 1997, her business model changed.

Since then, Topnotch has been the Alpha and Omega of trophies on the island, as more than 90 percent of Saipan's trophies and plaques are supplied by the company, now located along Middle Road in Garapan, besides Poon's Restaurant.

Villanueva said they source their trophies exclusively from the United States and have an updated catalog of styles and models that customers can choose from. Topnotch has two containers full of inventory, not counting the merchandise it has in its stockroom.

In terms of price, their most expensive trophy is the 3-foot, carved wood basketball trophy, which costs $300 apiece. Their cheapest cost $10, which are 3-inch

trophies that are most popular among emerging sports clubs.

Among the myriad of associations Topnotch caters to include the island's basketball (BANMI), tennis (NMITA), football (NMIFA), golf (RGA, Fil-Taga, Amigos), baseball (Little League and Saipan Major League), bowling (SBA), and badminton (NMBA) organizations.

Villanueva said the Northern Marianas Athletics and Coalition of Private and Public School Association also almost exclusively buy trophies and others awards like plaques and medals from Topnotch.

Aside from sports trophies, medals, and commemorative plaques, Topnotch also sells sports jerseys and promotional items.

To order trophies and other items from Topnotch, call 233-2200.

CARVING A NICHE

Looking for customized trophies sourced from off-island? Look no further than Yuichiro's at the back of the Northern Marianas Housing Authority in Garapan.

While they carry the usual types of trophies, customers looking for something out of the ordinary can contract them to search for one-of-a-kind trophies from the U.S. mainland and the Philippines.

Staffer Charlie Tapnio recalls that one customer in the past wanted a trophy or plaque made of glass. They were able to contact a supplier in the Philippines, only for the deal to fall through because the item was so heavy that the shipping cost was too prohibitive.

Nonetheless, Tapnio said this shows what lengths Yuichiro's would go to satisfy the demands of a customer.

Aside from trophies, Yuichiro's also is a print shop and sells promotional items and dabbles in retailing electronics on the side.

To order customized trophies from Yuichiro's, call 233-0955.

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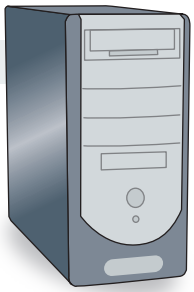
Goal-line technologies approved for soccer

Some bad calls in international soccer competition in recent years have driven officials governing the sport to investigate goal-line technologies, generally referred to as GLTs, to cut down on blown calls and implement them before the 2014 World Cup. Officials from major soccer associations met July 5 and approved implementation of two GLT systems.

GLT option 1 Hawk-Eye camera system

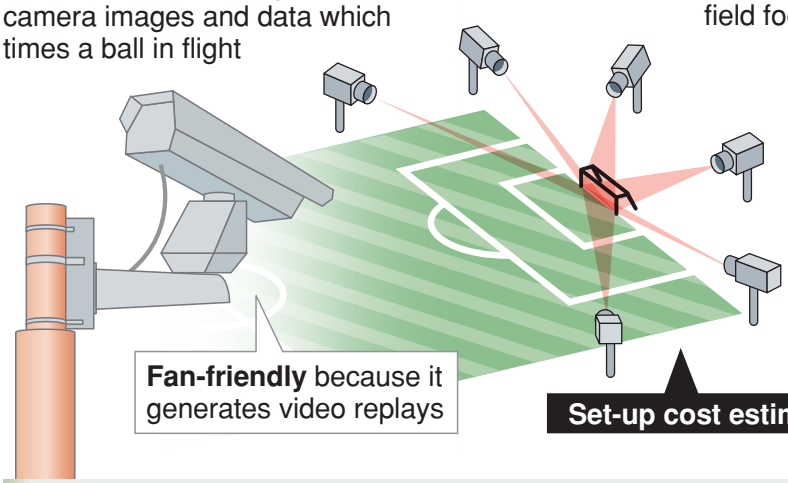


• **Hawk-Eye,** designed by a British firm, is based on triangulation of camera images and data which times a ball in flight

• An array of six high-speed cameras at each end of the field focus on the goal

• Software relies on imagery from at least two cameras to identify image pixels matching the ball's position

• System requires that 25 percent of the ball be in a camera's frame to gather data; a ball buried under a fallen player could be a problem

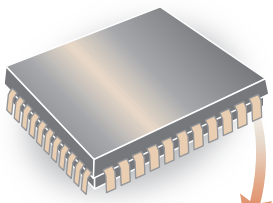


Fan-friendly because it generates video replays

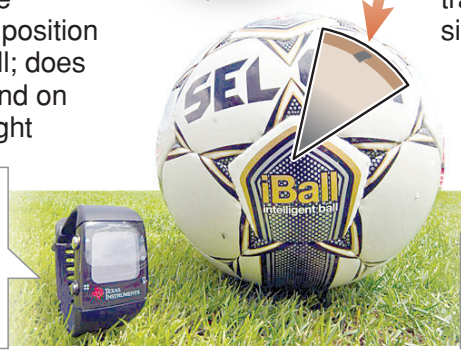
Set-up cost estimate: $150,000 to $250,000 per stadium

GLT option 2 GoalRef magnetic sensors

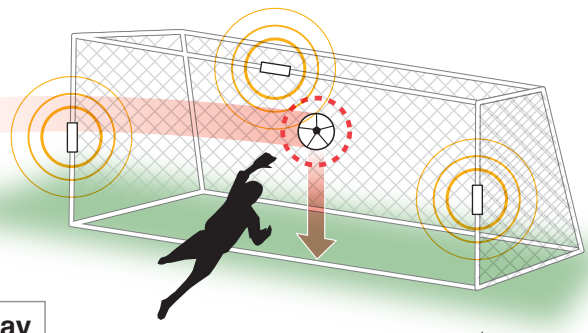
• **GoalRef,** designed by a Danish-German team, relies on a magnetic signal to plot the constant position of the ball; does not depend on line-of-sight



• Microchip between outer and inner layers of the ball transmits signal



• Sensors on side posts and crossbar detect rebound of electromagnetic pulses from chips as the ball breaks plane of goal line



Signal sent to watch worn by officials

Video replay is not part of the system

Cost unclear, but less than Hawk-Eye

The alphabet soup of international soccer

FIFA

International Federation of Association Football

Comprises 209 national members

UEFA

Union of European Football Associations

Comprises 53 nations, some in Asia

International Football Association Board

Comprised of representatives from FIFA and associations of England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland

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SEAN EDWARD SMITH

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

FAST FACTS

Full Name: Sean Edward Smith
Age: 26
Height: 5'8"
Weight: 145 lbs
Hometown: Stockton, California
Work: Law clerk for Presiding Judge Robert C. Naraja

A frustrated American football player, Sean Edward Smith chose to focus on running, which he later gave up for almost eight years, with law school eating up most of his time. Early last year, he decided to pick up his sneakers again, unable to resist Saipan's beautiful weather and scenic spots.

Find out how he almost missed finishing his first run on the island before winning a handful of races last year.

Q When did you start running on Saipan?

A I started running on Saipan in January 2012, which was the first time in eight years since high school that I began running consistently. A combination of three factors enticed me to run. First, I was looking for something to occupy my time. I was in a new place with new people and had no Internet or television at home. Second, I wanted to do something outdoors to soak in the island's beauty. Lastly, and most importantly, my neighbor, John Ulrich, asked me if I wanted to train with him for the annual Saipan Marathon. With great hesitation, since I had never run a marathon or any distance greater than a 5K, I accepted the invitation.

Q What distance were you used to running?

A I ran for Alameda High School in the Bay Area, California and was a member of the track and cross-country teams from 2001 to 2004. In track, I ran the 1,600-meter and 3,200-meter. In cross-country, I ran the varsity course which was a 5K (3.1 miles off road).

Q Any blunders in your high school races?

A During my junior year, I was on a very competitive 4x1600-meter relay team. I was the first leg. As I was stretching on the bleachers and listening to music, one of my relay members ran up to me in a panic to tell me the race was about to start. I grabbed my shoes and ran barefoot to the start line where everyone was lined up, the gun raised, and BANG! The runners took off as I was putting on my shoes! The first runner had nearly done a full lap around the track before I started. My relay team came in third place but would likely have been first if not for my absentmindedness. Immediately after the race, coach Bruce Hicks, who looked more like a bear than a man, grabbed me by the collar and roared something at me. To this day I don't know what he said because I was too petrified and focused on the veins bulging out of his neck!

Q How about your first race on Saipan? What happened?

A My first tournament here was the 2012 Annual Saipan Marathon Festival of Runs. It was also the hardest race I have ever done. I was completely unprepared to run the marathon. I applied my 5K race strategy to the 40K marathon, which was a poor decision, to say the least. During high school cross-country, I often incurred agonizing side aches whenever I drink or even take a sip of water before the races. With this in mind, I

decided not to hydrate at all during the marathon. Also, I went out at a very fast pace and even had an Olympian runner drafting off me for the first 20 minutes. After about 18 miles, I did something in a race I had never done before—I stopped. My legs quit working and I felt on the verge of passing out. At that moment, a racer saw I was in bad shape and stopped to offer me water and a goo pack. After initially waving him off in my delirium, I accepted the offer, perked up, and ran the last 8 miles while hydrating at the aid stations. I was shocked to find out I finished in 6th place overall at 3:19:00. I later learned the racer who helped me was Joshua Berger, who then became my sponsor, mentor, and friend, and persuaded me to get into triathlons.

Q You had a bike crash in the Rota Triathlon. Was that your first fall?

A My first crash, which was worse, happened three weeks prior to the Rota race during training. I was coming down a hill from Bird Island and picking up speed when I noticed a large pothole directly in front of me. It was too late to avoid. I braced for impact but I was ejected from my seat and landed on my back where I laid paralyzed for 15 seconds. But luckily, I got up with only minor scrapes and bruises.

Q Which do you prefer, an ocean swim or pool swim? MTB or road bike? Long or short distance run?

A I prefer ocean swim because it is far more scenic than a swimming pool and more buoyant. I have never done mountain biking, except once in Virginia when I was about 12 years old. Also, I had never been on a road bike until about May 2012. I thought about trying to return the road bike as soon as I bought it because it was extremely uncomfortable and awkward feeling. But after about a month of riding it, I felt natural on it and now I love it. I have always been exclusively a long distance runner and my fastest mile time is 5:15.

I prefer running in the morning because it is the coolest and most peaceful time of the day. I usually run before work from 6am to 7am along Beach Road. I like running on both flat and uphill courses but most of my running is on flat surfaces since the uphill is tough on my knees. I am very prone to knee injuries so I do my best to stick only to grass, sand, dirt or rubber surfaces for less impact.

Q The best course you've been on so far?

A The best running course I have done is Skyline in Oakland, California near the place I grew up. The 5K course is all on a dirt path that weaves around soaring redwood trees and meandering creeks. The air is cold and crisp and has a fresh cedar smell.

Q Do you wear a timer while racing?

A I never wear a timer or watch when racing because I find I do better if I pace myself to how I am feeling than to a certain time.

Q Most athletes have nicknames. What's yours?

A TarZean. It is a combination of Tarzan and my actual name, Sean. I earned it because I often run through the jungle alone where I tend to do reckless things, which landed me in the hospital during the 2011 Christmas Eve.

Q Any sport you loved but did not love you back?

A American football. I desperately wanted to do well because football is my favorite sport and I wanted to be like my older brother who was the leading touchdown scorer and best player on the varsity team. My visions of glory were stamped out soon after joining the team in high school, as I quickly became known as the tackling dummy. After each practice, I hobbled home and spent many evenings sitting in an ice bath, all for a total of 24 seconds (three plays) of playing time for the entire season.

Q Any sport you will not dare to try?

A Rugby because there I would also likely be the tackling dummy, except with no helmet or pads.

Q Things you do here besides running?

A When not running and not at work, I'm hiking, sipping banana paradises on the beach, gorging myself at one of the delicious hotel buffets, camping on Managaha, riding my bike around Marpi, scuba diving or snorkeling, and hanging out with friends. I also like playing beach volleyball and ultimate frisbee occasionally.

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Negahr Rastguiy

AT THE TOP OF HER GAME

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Negahr Alexandria Rastguiy plays tennis, basketball, beach and indoor volleyball, soccer, and futsal and is also into athletics and swimming.

She is a multi-sports athlete but so are a lot of other youth in the CNMI. So what makes the difference? It's the brilliance she shows in almost all the sports she gets into.

Negahr led Whispering Palms to the junior varsity championship in the private school volleyball league and won the MVP trophy last season. In beach volleyball, she was part of the U14 team that topped the NMIVA-sponsored tournament last year. In basketball, she helped Whispering Palms advance to the finals and was a member of the All-Conference Team. Negahr also debuted in the Kanoa Resort women's caging and was honored as one of the best players in the league.

In soccer, the 13-year-old dynamo was a member of Sexy Beaches that ruled a beach soccer tournament last month. She played for MP United U15 and was a candidate for the Golden Boot award in the NMIFA fall league. In futsal, she once played for the then winless IT&E Awesome, which went on to win successive matches with Negahr on its roster and scoring several goals.

In athletics, she consistently made it to the Top 5 in middle distance races in three age groups (U10, U12, and U14) of the NMA All Schools Championships, and in swimming, she contributed points in individual and medley relay races for Whispering Palms, which ruled the elementary division of the All Schools Swim Meet for the last eight years.

In tennis alone, Negahr will need a lot of space to list her accomplishments. To cite her most recent ones, she won the girls U15 singles and women's open doubles crowns in the Tan Holdings Tennis Classic in December 2012 and was a finalist in the girls U15 singles in the North Pacific Qualifying Tournament in Guam and also in the U12 singles in the 2011 Pacific Oceania Junior Championships in Fiji. With her success, both in local and regional tournaments, Negahr was selected to the Pacific Oceania Touring Team that will compete in various events in Australia this January. She was also part of the same elite team that went to New Zealand in 2011.

Active, balanced life

Negahr forgets which sport she tried first but remembers enjoying every game because of the support she gets from her parents, Saeed and Minsook.

"I am not completely sure which sport I learned first. I was just active from the start of my childhood. When I was younger, I used to do tennis, soccer, and swimming, and had

➥

Negahr Alexandria Rastguiy shows brilliance in almost all the sports she gets into.

ROSELYN MONROYO

Tan Holdings

SPORTS CALENDAR

2013 Coffee Trail Run

Held either in the last week of January or early February, this event is part of the CNMI's Festival of Runs in the first quarter. The race features 10K and 20K runs and brings runners to the most challenging and scenic terrain on Saipan. Beginning and finishing at Micro Beach at the American Memorial Park, the race rises 1,500 feet to the highest point on the island—the Mt. Tapochao—following twists and turns through the mountaintop before returning to the finish line. The course takes runners through wild coffee plantations planted in the Japanese-colonial era of the island and through the young coffee groves of Marianas Coffee Co. Runner will enjoy the sweeping panoramas of the Pacific Ocean and the Philippine Sea.

2013 Coconut Tennis Classic

Living up to its name, this tournament held every February used to award coconut as trophies to winners. What also makes this event unique is the pairing of adults and junior players for the "mixed-up" doubles.

2013 Tan Holdings Doubles Badminton Competition

The season-opening tournament of the Northern Marianas Badminton Association, this event is held in March and features players from the five clubs on the island—the TAGA Badminton Club, the Shirley's Badminton Club, Saipan Badminton Club, the Berks Blazers, and the Golden Racquets—and is played at the TSL Sports Complex.

2013 Marianas Interscholastic Sports Organization Basketball League

The league features the upcoming CNMI youth players, who also battle for bragging rights for their respective schools. Marianas High School, Kagman High School, Saipan Southern High School, Grace Christian Academy, and Mt. Carmel School are the perennial participants in the league that runs for three months (January to February), while Tinian High School occasionally fly in to play at the MHS Gymnasium.

2013 Coalition of Private School Sports Association Basketball League

The league follows the home and away format and has the junior varsity and varsity teams of various private schools on Saipan. The list includes Saipan Community School, Grace Christian Academy, Mt. Carmel School, Marianas Baptist Academy, Saipan International School, Whispering Palms, Agape Christian School, and Northern Marianas Academy. The league runs from January to March.

2013 NMASA Awards Banquet

Held in February, the event allows Northern Marianas Amateur Sports Association to recognize the top performers of the season and the officials who made great contribution to CNMI sports.

2013 SSC International Invitational Meet

To be held on March 29 and 30 at the Kan Pacific Swimming Pool, the tournament pits the host Saipan Swim Club and Tsunami Saipan against the various clubs from Guam. Northern Marianas Swimming Federation sanctions the event and times are considered in CNMI records.

8th Annual Saipan Marathon

The biggest running event in the CNMI will hit the road on March 2 and is expected to draw runners from Korea, Japan, Guam, and other neighboring countries. Last year, the event, which features a 10K, half marathon, marathon, and 50K, lured more than 800 participants, including former Olympian Eric Wainaina of Kenya.

2013 XTERRA Saipan

The premier off-road triathlon in the CNMI will be held on March 9. Triathletes from around the world will try to survive the challenging bike and run trail courses on the northern side of the island and enjoy the pristine water of Micro Beach. XTERRA's Crown Jewel features a 1.5K swim, 20K MTB, and 12K trail run.

2013 Tagaman Triathlon

The oldest triathlon event in the Western Pacific will take place on March 16. It is not for the faint of heart, as the race is longer than XTERRA Saipan with its 2K swim leg, 60K bike race, and 15K run. The race starts at the Pacific Islands Club while the bike and run legs cover both the southern and northern part of the island.

This advertisement is sponsored by Tan Siu Lin Foundation

piano lessons. I then quit soccer and swimming, feeling that tennis was more my sport. I continued playing the piano for I needed balance in my life," Negahr said.

"My parents took me to many places and allowed me to play any sport I wanted. My dad used to play soccer professionally and was probably the second active member of the family, second to me," she added.

Negahr's tennis coach, Jeff Race, admires how she does many activities and excels in almost all the sports she joins.

"Sometimes she comes to tennis training and she is already tired from other sports, but she still comes. Every year she does basketball, volleyball, track, swimming, soccer…and she is at the top of them all, but tennis is No. 1 for her. She is such a talented athlete that there is tons of pressure for her to join other sports. Of course she does it because she just loves sports, too," Race said.

Negahr's busy schedule starts at 6am, as she prepares for school with her classes ending at 2:30pm. The rest of the afternoon is then spent on sports, friends, and homework.

"On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, I go to the gym with a group of tennis friends and execute a planned workout from 3pm to 4pm. On Tuesday, Thursdays, and Saturdays, I practice tennis with coach Jeff and other players. We practice tennis from 5:15pm to 6:45pm," said Negahr, who watches movies with her friends or go over to their house on her free time.

In school, she is also doing well with the help of her teacher Mark Epley, who supports her sports activities.

"I've been getting excellent grades and joining activities outside school hasn't been a distraction. Before joining a sport, I make sure that the schedules don't interfere with each other," she added.

Diminutive but deadly

At 5 feet and 97 lbs, Negahr is usually underestimated by her tennis foes, who would later realize their mistake.

"I play against kids older and taller than me, but that hasn't bothered me or affected the way I play. Sometimes their appearance might be bit intimidating, but it hasn't been too much of a distraction. Some people may get too cocky and think my size is an advantage for them, but once they see me on the court, I think their mind is blown. I do not think I have an advantage and neither do my opponents. They may have one or two, for instance, being a lot stronger or being able to reach lobs easier, but other than that, height doesn't really matter," said Negahr.

Australian and New Zealand players fell to Negahr's deceptive physique in 2011 and so did several adult players in the CNMI. She made it to the finals of three events in New Zealand and won numerous matches against older and taller players.

Negahr is so competitive that Race includes her in training sessions for boys.

"Her level is so high that she is usually training with the boys U18 player. Sometimes I have to remind her when she is disappointed in losing to them, that she is a 13-year-old girl," Race said.

Negahr acknowledges being upset over losses but has since learned to accept defeat as just part of the game.

"To be honest, I never cried over a loss when I was younger. I was less serious about the sport and played for fun. Of course I was disappointed, but I forgot about it quickly. As I grew older, I became more serious and emotional about it. I would sometimes cry over a defeat and get angry at times," she said.

"Now, I think I've grown mature enough to realize that people are going to lose sometimes, and all you have to do is learn from your mistakes and not sulk, blaming yourself and giving yourself a hard time. Tennis is definitely a hard sport and maybe the hardest sport to accomplish. When you play, the only person you can blame is yourself and that can become a great flaw in people's match play," said Negahr.

She started training with Race when she was about 7 years old and blossomed to become one of the top junior players in the CNMI.

"It was apparent when I met Negahr that she was going to be a special athlete. Of course it still took her years to develop her skills, but it happened at a faster rate than most students," Race said.

She can use both hands when returning shots, a skill that later surprised her teammates and foes in basketball with her lefty moves.

"I used to hit with both hands in tennis, but I later changed to only hitting with my right hand. When I play basketball, my dominant hand is my left, but I can dribble with my right as well. When I shoot layups, free throws, and jumpers, I use my left hand," Negahr said.

Going pro

Though she plays a lot of sports, Negahr agrees with Race that she has to prioritize tennis to realize her dreams.

"I would think that tennis is what I do best, partly because of the time I've spent with the sport. I would like to get into a tennis school with a full scholarship and hopefully become a professional tennis player," Negahr said.

"Playing tennis is something many people will never understand. It's not just a sport or something you do on a weekend; it's a way of living life. Once you're in it, it's in your blood. Once you have hit your first winner, cracked your first ace, hit your first through the legs, or won your first match or tournament, it will be pumping through your blood forever. The court is home away from home and a tournament becomes more than an activity; it a life-changing event. When you feel a clean winner off your racquet and hear the sound of the ball, you know you're home," Negahr added, citing the philosophy of an athlete she once read about.

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Exercise in disguise

CLARISSA V. DAVID

Visiting Zumba education specialist Carolina Arias, standing right, is joined by, clockwise, Zumba fitness instructors Amy Sletten and Elitza Stoilova of Saipan, and Josh Pocaigue of Guam, following the first-ever Zumba Master Class on island on Nov. 9, 2012.

CLARISSA V. DAVID
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

ZUMBA FITNESS CRAZE SWEEPS THE MARIANAS

With interest in Zumba growing rapidly in the Pacific, more and more people—men, women, and even the youth—are getting into the Latin-inspired fitness craze, with some attending formal training to become licensed Zumba instructors.

Gold's Gym Saipan recently hosted this training on island, bringing together dozens of aspiring Zumba instructors on Saipan and the neighboring island of Guam. The event was headlined by no less than internationally renowned Zumba education specialist Carolina Arias.

The Zumba Fitness Instructor Training in November resulted in 37 newly certified instructors who are now qualified to spread the Zumba love not only in the two U.S. territories but all over the world.

As an education specialist, the vivacious Arias holds Zumba instructor trainings worldwide, with most of her schedule devoted to training sessions throughout Asia, the Pacific, Australia, and New Zealand where she has been residing for six years.

Although Arias has always been in the fitness training industry even in Chile, where she hails from, she wouldn't have fallen in love with Zumba if she hadn't decided in 2006 to pack her stuff and move to New Zealand, a country she considered "small and safe."

"I never thought I was going to end up staying there," reveals Arias, who was about to turn 30 when she made up her mind to leave her hometown, bringing with her only a little knowledge of the English language.

In New Zealand, she began working her way once again to become a group fitness instructor and was convinced by her manager to learn Zumba.

"I attended the training and I absolutely loved it!" said Arias, who became a Zumba fitness instructor in 2009 and a Zumba education specialist the following year. "I really believe in the program. It can do really good things for people."

Nowadays, Arias conducts a wide array of trainings on various Zumba programs, including Zumba Gold, Aqua Zumba, Zumba Toning, Zumbatomic, and Zumba Sentao.

Carolina Arias during her first visit to Saipan in November 2012. A native of Chile, Arias moved to New Zealand before her 30th birthday, where she fell in love with Zumba and trained to become a Zumba education specialist—someone who conducts trainings to Zumba instructor wannabes. CLARISSA V. DAVID

CLARISSA V. DAVID

Zumba education specialist Carolina Arias leads other Zumba enthusiasts in working out a sweat last Nov. 9, 2012 in the first ever Zumba Master Class held at Gold's Gym Saipan parking lot.

Non-verbal

Teaching Zumba isn't difficult to do as it only requires connecting with your students using non-verbal communication, says Arias.

"When we teach, we don't use a microphone so it doesn't matter if you don't speak the language of the place because you can still teach."

Arias cited the case of another Chilean in New Zealand, whom she was able to convince to teach Zumba even while she speaks only a little English. The woman now teaches four Zumba classes.

One needs time and practice to become an effective Zumba instructor, Arias said. She also cites the importance of being aware of and learning from one's weaknesses, accepting constructive criticism, getting together with other instructors, as well as the need to stay grounded to improve one's craft.

"At the end of the day, we work for the people and with people," reminds Arias.

Joining a network of instructors is also another way of continuing one's Zumba education. For a monthly membership fee, you can receive immense help from other instructors as well as countless Zumba materials like DVDs, choreography, and tons of music. Instructors also receive assistance in creating your own Zumba website at no extra cost.

Becoming a licensed instructor opens up a world of opportunities, according to Arias, what with Zumba gaining momentum across the globe. For example, jobs are no longer limited to just instructors. Enthusiasts can also become a Zumba jammer—an instructor who choreographs Zumba music and sets up jam sessions where instructors can come and learn.

Licensed Zumba instructors also meet at an annual convention that gathers thousands of instructors from all over the world. In 2012, the convention was held in Orlando, Florida, where 7,500 Zumba instructors got together to exchange ideas and learn more about this fun and continuously evolving fitness program. "When people come and do their Basic 1 training, they don't really know what they're getting into. It's a whole new world out there."

Zumba is for everyone

Arias touts Zumba as a fitness program that's great for everyone—male or female, young or old—it doesn't matter whether or not you know how to groove.

"It's all about moving and having fun. You have to leave it up to us; we'll make you dance. You will learn," she says.

Arias explains that Zumba participants easily become familiar with the steps because they're repetitive, with hints of variation that you dance with all kinds of music. While it is mainly Latin, Zumba music is actually incorporated with international rhythms, allowing dancers to put more energy into their movements and routines.

"We make it a little approachable so everyone can dance it," she adds.

Arias' visit featured her in the first-ever Zumba Master Class, which was also hosted by Gold's Gym Saipan on Nov. 9. Clad in a bluish gray halter top and pair of cropped purple leggings, Arias was on fire when she went on stage and helped a pack of over 70 Zumba aficionados get into the groove as soon as the music played—from salsa and merengue to swing and flamenco and even Bollywood, which Arias loves.

"It's all about the music, how you feel the music," she says. "The more you feel it, the more energy you're going to burn while dancing."

Arias tells people to stop making excuses and experience Zumba and the health benefits that it can give them.

"You will never know if you don't try. Just try one class and if you didn't like the class or the instructor, try another one. We have different instructors with different styles. You just need to find the one that suits you," she says.

The need to get into a fitness program like Zumba is particularly high in the Northern Marianas where non-communicable diseases like obesity and diabetes pose a threat to the health of the general population.

"Zumba is just a great way of getting into an exercise routine. That's why for me and for Zumba in general, it's important that it grows here on the islands because it's a good option for people to get healthy," Arias adds.

Guam's Josh Pocaigue, a licensed Zumba instructor who joined the Zumba party in November, says he is a living testament to the health benefits of the fitness program, which he described as a "workout in disguise."

The 24-year-old Pocaigue, who used to weigh 230 lbs, now tips the scales at 155 lbs, thanks to Zumba, which he embraced in 2008.

"All it took was one person to inspire me. Zumba not just changed my life but saved it. Like what I tell my students back home, and I'm going to spread the word here, that no matter what you do or how old you are, it's never too late to live a happier and healthier lifestyle," he adds.

With more licensed instructors now on Saipan, Arias is excited and optimistic that Zumba will expand on the islands.

"The best thing everywhere I go is the people. The people of Saipan are very nice, energetic, welcoming. They just make you feel like at home," she says, adding that the island's community of Zumba instructors feels like a family, same as in any Zumba community everywhere.

Arias hopes to do more Zumba instructor trainings on Saipan—an indication that more and more people are getting on the Zumba fitness bandwagon.

"If they ever wonder, don't think. Just go to a Zumba class and experience it. It's going to change your life. If it's about getting results, it's the funnest way of losing weight. So hopefully, I'll be back again on Saipan and train more instructors."

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VARICELLA

Chickenpox (also called varicella) is a common childhood disease. It is usually mild, but it can be serious, especially in young infants and adults.

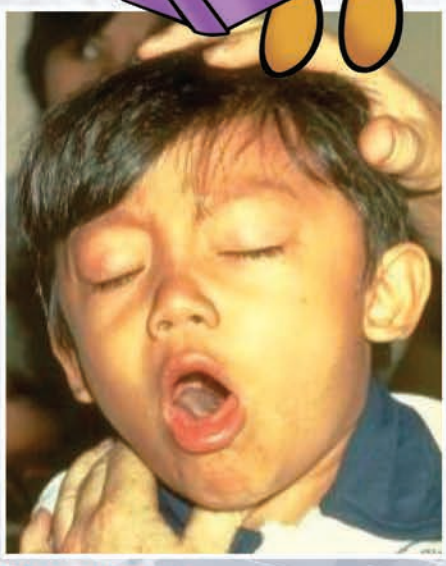
This photo shows the typical itchy chicken-pox rash. There can be 500 sores or more.

*Photos provided by CDC.

MUMPS

Mumps virus causes fever, head-ache, muscle pain, loss of appetite, and swollen glands.

This child's jaw and cheek are swollen from mumps. Mumps can lead to painful swelling of the testicles in males (sometimes causing sterility), deafness, and brain damage.



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Comeback kingpin

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Ruselle Zapanta poses with his bowling ball following his triumph in a recent tournament on Saipan.

CNMI bowler Ruselle Zapanta advanced to the quarterfinals of the 26th Asian Intercity Bowling Championships in Penang, Malaysia last October. While he ultimately lost to a kegler from Macau and went on to finish seventh out of 66 participants, Ruselle's performance marked a Commonwealth bet's best-ever finish in the masters events of the annual competition.

"I was excited to compete again in the Intercity, especially after coming close to winning a singles medal in Singapore last year (2011). It is a great and fun environment, competing with friends and bowlers we've met in past competitions. Also, a little bit of luck always helps. I just tried to stay relaxed and composed to bowl the best game and win. I just really wanted to win a medal. That's my motivation after coming close last year," said Ruselle.

His exceptional performance notwithstanding, what others don't know is that the 26-year-old former youth bowler was on a sort of sabbatical from the sport.

Ruselle's father, bowling organizer Ross, was himself surprised with his son's Cinderella run in the Asian Intercity tournament.

"It [Ruselle reaching the quarterfinals] was really out of nowhere because Ruselle was almost in hiatus from bowling before the tournament due to his work and soccer schedule and I never expected him to bowl that well. The bowlers he beat were all very good and from well-organized and well-coached bowling associations," said the elder Zapanta. Ruselle's stint with the U.S. Marines for four years added to his rustiness in the sport. Add to that his increasing involvement in soccer, where he's a certified referee and national player, and one can understand why some would've doubted his bowling abilities coming into the Penang Asian Intercity.

"Maybe it was his stamina for being a soccer player that allowed him to be consistent in so many days of competition. Even in the last game that he lost, he was bowling very well, hitting the pocket consistently except he was left with the tenpin to spare several times, while his opponent had some lucky shots. I guess it was just an unlucky break for Ruselle because had he won the last match play he would've won a bronze medal," said Ross.

Prior to the 26th Asian Intercity Championships, Ruselle also suited up for the tournament's editions in Busan, South Korea in 2001, Taipei, Taiwan in 2002, Jakarta, Indonesia in 2005, Tamuning, Guam in 2009, Pasay, Philippines in 2010, and Singapore City, Singapore in 2011.

Backswing

The eldest son of Ross and Gigi Zapanta, Ruselle started bowling when he was about 7. That's when he and younger brother Raymond first got a bowling ball from their father.

"[Raymond] and I started when my dad got us a red, 6-lb bowling ball. I pretty much grew up in the bowling alley. My parents bowled almost every day of the week."

Raphael, the Zapanta brothers' youngest sibling, is also an accomplished bowler.

Ruselle said his father has been the biggest influence in his young bowling career and among local and international bowlers he admires many time Professional Bowling Association champion Pete Weber the most.

"My father gave me that drive to win, winning and fighting spirit. He taught me and my brothers how to play. I also admire Raymond. He is one of the most consistent and precise bowlers on the island. Then as I got more serious with bowling, I would watch professionals on TV and learn what I could and try to imitate them. Pete Weber is my favorite pro bowler. He is versatile and has an attractive style of play," he said.

Ross said his eldest son was always serious about the sport, even during his formative years.

"I believe that when he was 8 or 9 years old, we already saw that he has the natural ability to be good in the sport. We also saw how interested he is because he would watch those professional bowlers even when the tournaments were being shown here like 3 or 4 in the morning. Either that or he would record them to watch later. I guess he watched a lot of Pete Weber, that's why he has the high backswing," he said.

Ruselle would study lane conditions, ball reactions, ball drilling, and other technical aspects. Up to now, he still plots the drilling of his and his brothers' bowling balls.

Perfect dream

While Ruselle has taken home several King of the Lanes monthly tournament trophies, his biggest local victory so far was winning the Class A of the Philippine Bowling Association Classified Tournament.

Every bowler's dream still continues to elude Ruselle, however, as, unlike his brother Raymond, he has yet to roll a perfect game.

"I've never bowled a perfect game but I have reached 290 twice. Unfortunately, I never had a chance for a perfect game. I did roll a 290 but it was a spare in the first frame then hitting 11 strikes in a row," he said.

Ruselle said other than rolling a 300, he hopes to continue competing in the Asian Intercity Championships and one day finally medal. On Saipan, he wants to win the Bowler of the Year title.

"I need to catch up to Raymond who has won that tournament aside from having bowled a perfect game. I think I am the better spare shooter but Ray can rack up the strikes. I give Ray the advantage if we go one-on-one because he has won more tournaments and has bowled a couple of perfect games," he quipped.

Still, he is thankful for what the sport has given him, including the chance to travel abroad, joining regional and international competitions while donning the CNMI's colors.

"I have to give lots of credit to my parents and SBA (Saipan Bowling Association) president Jerry Tan for giving me and my brothers the opportunity to compete and travel. During our travels, we gained lots of experiences and learned many things about the sport from others that helped us improve," he said.

Even the elder Zapanta couldn't help but heap praise on Tan for supporting his sons' development in bowling.

"He's almost like a second father to our sons and when he saw the potential in them, he encouraged them to compete in international tournaments. He sponsored a lot of their trips and he always makes sure that Saipan had a team for at least one off-island competition a year," he said

Asked if he has any advice to aspiring bowlers out there, Ruselle said that aside from practicing, those starting in the sport should use the proper equipment. "Keep bowling and get a proper fit on your bowling ball. Keep the holes snug and not too big. I think the grip on your ball is very important."

Gridiron resurrection

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Nearly seven years after the last Commonwealth Football League game was played, the CFL Sharks traveled to Manila, Philippines, last November to begin a new chapter of the local gridiron sport.

The last official game of the CFL was played on Dec. 3, 2005, when the Shell Lightning defeated the Express Electronics Eagles, 16-8, in the championship game at the CPA Airport Field.

On Nov. 10, 2012, the CFL Sharks suited up with their helmets, pads, and cleats once again for an off-island match against the Philippine Punishers.

The newly resurrected league's hodge-podge team gave a good account of itself throughout the game but ultimately lost to a more seasoned and more talented Philippine team, mostly made up of American expatriates, 13-6.

The Sharks may have lost the game but playing in its first official game since 2005—chalk it up as a win for the CFL.

Kickoff

John Blanco, one of the founding fathers of the league who is also spearheading its current revival with Jeff Boyer, said the original CFL was founded in 2000 and played a total of two games against Guam—a home and an away game—that year.

League games began in earnest in 2001 with four teams in the inaugural season. The founding teams included eventual champion Budweiser Predators (8-0), Miller Barbarians (4-4), Verizon Blaze (2-6), and Tinian Typhoons (1-7).

The Miller Barbarians got back at the Budweiser Predators a year later, hoisting the CFL diadem in 2002 despite a so-so 3-3 win-loss season.

Budweiser Predators (4-1) were cruising before being upended by their rivals in the finale. Only three teams suited up that season as the Tinian Typhoons weren't able to make the cross-island ferry trip to Saipan. Verizon Blaze went winless at 0-5.

The three-team format continued the next two years with the Budweiser Predators completing another perfect season (5-0) in 2003 against the Miller Barbarians (3-3) and Verizon Blaze (0-5).

In 2004, the Shell Chiefs played its first season while the CFL bid adieu to the Budweiser Predators. It was a Cinderella season for the Shell Chiefs as they won all five games that season en route to taking the championship against the surprising Verizon Nitro (1-5). The Miller Barbarians regressed that year and finished with a 2-3 mark.

The Tinian Typhoons (3-4) returned the next season in 2005, but it was the renamed Shell Lightning (6-1), again ruling the roost by beating the Express Electronics Eagles (5-3). The Barbarians hit rock bottom that year in the CFL's final season with a 0-6 mark.

Halftime

CFL officials moving off-island to take care of loved ones or because of work commitments resulted in the league going on a sabbatical for its would-be fifth season in 2006.

The first to leave the CNMI was CFL commissioner Jessie Stein, who rushed to San Antonio, Texas, to be with his son, Josh, who was wounded during his deployment in Iraq.

CFL Sharks running-back Jeff Boyer tries to elude the defense of the Philippine Punishers during their game last Nov. 10. The Sharks lost 16-8.

BOB GUERRERO

BOB GUERRERO

CFL receiver/defensive back Jerome Norita (16) and lineman Joe Ocampo (partly hidden) congratulates Philippine Punishers players following their game last Nov. 10

Shortly after, Clyde Lemons, the CFL chairman, moved to Guam for work and this effectively halted any plans for launching a 2006 season.

In 2007, it was Blanco's turn to move off-island after his son, Juan, was diagnosed with leukemia. "This forced me to relocate with my family to Hawaii for a few months to help take care of him," he said.

Two years later in 2009, a CFL revival seemed eminent when two teams started hosting practices and another team was making preparations to suit up as well, according to Blanco.

"But the effort fell through, though, and no further efforts were made until 2012," he said.

Fourth and long

Fast-forward to July 23, 2012, in what Blanco aptly describes as the "return of football" in the CNMI.

The date marked the first football practice of the revived CFL with over 100 different guys coming out at the Hopwood Junior High School Field.

"The turnout was pretty good for the first day and turnouts, since then, have been pretty good so far. Average practice size has been in the neighborhood of 25 to 30 players on any given day," he said.

The genesis of the league's revival curiously came after Blanco read about the CNMI's

sports rival Guam playing the Philippine Punishers in early 2012.

"I had read about the Philippines playing a game against Guam earlier this year and thought it would be a great idea to form a team to play internationally. Surprisingly enough, upon further investigation, I found out that several other teams in Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Guangzhou were also forming football teams for the first time. I felt it would be a great idea to compete with these teams and eventually revive league play here in the CNMI," he said.

Quarterback sneak

The CFL finally got back in the game, so to speak, in the match in Manila last November. While they lost to the Punishers, CFL Sharks players still took a lot of positives in the CFL's first game in almost seven years.

Offensive and defensive tackle Anthony Aguon, for one, said it was a great experience playing at the international level.

"The Philippine Punishers are already an established team so we knew we had our work cut out for us. Performance-wise, I would give us a five. We made a lot of mistakes, but that's kind of expected in our first official game! A definite 10 for effort, though! Our team practiced and played hard, but didn't know what to expect. Now that we got our first game out of the way, we have a better idea of what we have to do to win," he said.

Defensive end Jaime Martinez said that losing to the Punishers by a mere touchdown was already a morale victory for the CFL Sharks.

"This was the first time in many years that some of us played so we were a little rusty but as the game continued we got into our flow. The team had many obstacles to overcome, the biggest being that we only had 20 guys against the Punishers' 40. The other team was able to cycle in fresh players, which we did not have the luxury to do. Although we were all very tired, the guys really stepped up and made some big offensive and defensive plays. One of the good things we found out was that there are many things on offense and defense that we need to work on and become better at for our game against Guam," he said.

Scouting report

A couple of months removed from the CFL Sharks' game against the Punishers, Blanco said he already has a good feeling about the future of the revived CFL.

"We have always felt that there are more than enough guys willing to play football here in the CNMI and we have proven that we can suit up as many as four teams—2001 and 2005 season—when we are in full swing. Finding guys to lead these teams has been a challenge, though. On top of that, football is not a cheap sport. The average cost to suit up a player can range from $200 to $300. This includes the football jersey and pants, football helmet, football shoulder pads, and leg pads. Whatever the case, we would eventually like to restart the league in a year or two. Identifying responsible, capable leaders for these teams will be key," he said.

Lineman Ed Arriola Jr. shares Blanco's concern with the high cost of equipment and has done more than his share to help equip others with donations.

"My equipment donations were not as much as John's. I gave a few rib guards, girdles hip pads, and helmets. The Tan Siu Lin Foundation also has donated some venue space for a fundraiser and purchased large pieces of field equipment for games," said Arriola, who also serves as TSL Foundation manager.

Blanco said he and Boyer also always felt that the youth divisions are going to be important in the CFL's long-term plans.

"Ultimately, our main focus in the months and years to come will be to revive not only the youth league for 11-14 year old players but to also begin a junior varsity and varsity program for the high schools as well. When it's all said and done, we hope to directly impact between 700 to 800 student athletes," he said.

Arriola also has a positive outlook for the team and the league. "The team is strong, the talent is there. We need more time and lights to practice at night. If the community can help us, if the government can help us, it would be much appreciated."

Postgame reactions

As to how the CNMI community views the resurrection of local gridiron sport, Blanco said the reactions have been mixed so far.

"Football is a misunderstood sport here in the CNMI and a lot of people still do not understand the game. In an island where baseball is religion and basketball and soccer are played year-round as well, football is still a foreign sport where the only time it truly has the attention of the CNMI is around Super Bowl time.

"Despite that, our fan base is growing and, if history is any proof, CFL games have always been a big draw for CNMI fans. Our upcoming rivalry game against Guam should draw a large crowd as always," he said.

Blanco said enthusiasm for American football appears to be still guarded—at best—simply because it's been so long since there actually had been a game on Saipan.

"Players and fans alike are naturally skeptical and are taking a 'seeing is believing' approach to the matter altogether. As always, we welcome those that truly want to help out with making this dream a reality here in the CNMI. New players are always welcome to come out and join the team and we also welcome any legitimate attempts to form new teams that fall under the auspices of this organization. Our doors are always open to those that want to help further the sport of American football here in the CNMI. We intend on being a permanent fixture in the CNMI sporting community. With the community's help, we can work to ensure that this time around, football is here to stay!"

BOXING

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

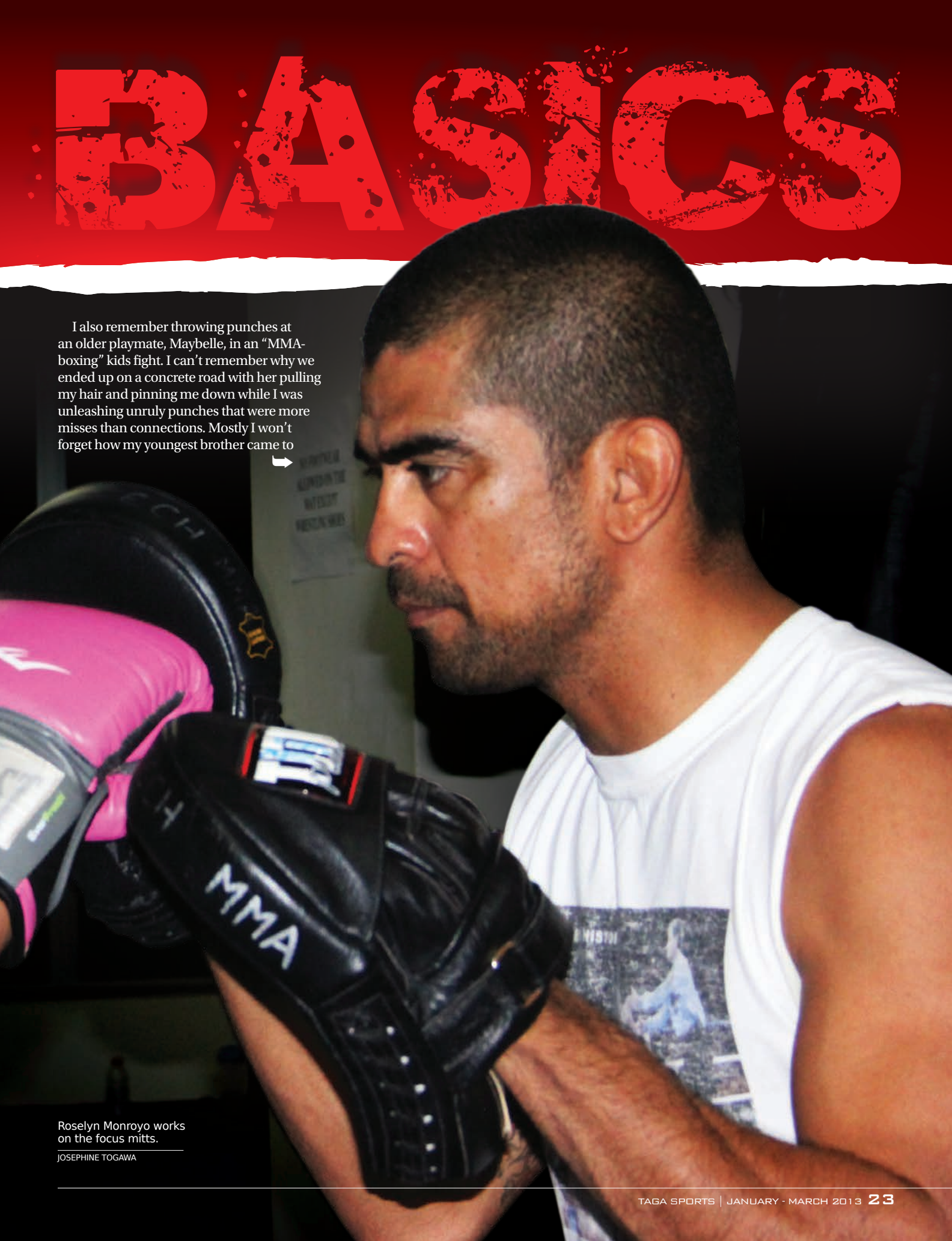
No, I don't plan to trade my byline for the moniker Roselyn "The Assassin" Monroyo and challenge Tara "The Tarantula" Namauleg to an exhibition bout in Trench Tech's Rites of Passage. I just wanted to give boxing a try as the sport brings back a lot of childhood memories.

I grew up watching boxing bouts on TV with my family. In between rounds my late father would talk about the "Thrilla in Manila" that featured boxing greats Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier. Then there was Mike Tyson. To this day, I still could not believe how he bit off part of Evander Holyfield's right ear during their WBA heavyweight title bout in Las Vegas in 1997.

In our neighborhood, kids boxed and wrestled using their shirts as makeshift gloves, their ring an old mattress that one of our neighbors threw away. My playmates and I were spectators who also sometimes acted as referees. Yes, there were no "Round Girls" that time.

BASICS

I also remember throwing punches at an older playmate, Maybelle, in an "MMA-boxing" kids fight. I can't remember why we ended up on a concrete road with her pulling my hair and pinning me down while I was unleashing unruly punches that were more misses than connections. Mostly I won't forget how my youngest brother came to



Roselyn Monroyo works on the focus mitts.

JOSEPHINE TOGAWA

JOSEPHINE TOGAWA

Trench Tech's Cuki Alvarez holds the punching bag as Roselyn Monroyo tries to throw some punches.

my rescue. With my short reach and my foe enjoying the position advantage, my brother stepped in and poured a can of sand on Maybelle's head. The trick caught Maybelle off guard and I managed to stand up and go home with my brother, who helped remove sand from my hair too.

So, yes, I needed boxing lessons. Badly. Not that I was expecting any bout soon but it's one of those skills that are handy when you need to know how to do a right hook properly. That's where Cuki Alvarez came in.

Warming up

The night before I went to Trench Tech's gym at the Marianas Business Plaza, I told a co-worker I had mixed emotions about my "boxing" session with Cuki. I was excited to try on the headgear, the gloves, and especially the mouthpiece. I use to box with my cousins, also on a bed (now my aunt knew why the mattress sagged), and would use an overchewed gum as our mouthpiece, so I was really curious how it feels to have a real one on.

I was also nervous and worried about making mistakes in front of a seasoned fighter and trainer like Cuki and of getting injured, which usually happens to a first-timer.

However, I began to relax the moment Cuki began making me do stretching drills. The drills cover the top to bottom parts of the body, but there were more for the legs and knees, as Cuki said we use them more when boxing. The drills usually run from 10 to 15 minutes and are followed by a light jog around the gym for 5 to 10 minutes.

Gear up, hands up

As soon as I loosened up, Cuki geared me up with a pair of pink boxing gloves. Usually, boxers tape their hands (a strip of cloth wrapped securely around the wrist, the palm, and the base of the thumb before putting on the gloves to protect the wrist and hands) but since I am just going for a basic lesson and would not be throwing rock-hard punches, I passed up on the hand wrap.

On the blue mat, Cuki first showed me the fighting stance. We started by standing straight, both feet in, and then the right foot gliding a few inches to the right and then back, leaving the left foot in front with our body angled and our hands up for protection.

Cuki repeatedly told me to keep my elbows in as having it too wide would leave an opening for body shots. My hands should also be up always, between the chin and the head.

CUKI'S SAFETY TIPS

1. Always be sure to purchase and use the right gear for training. Use hand wraps to protect your wrists, hands, and knuckles and the proper size boxing gloves. For sparring purposes, mouthpiece and headgear are MANDATORY.
2. Be sure to always start your session off with a good warm up and stretch.
3. When drilling with a partner or instructor, it is always best to control the power of your punches and throw the proper punches. Working on technique is very important, so do throwing proper punches and controlling your punches.
4. Never horse play when drilling technique. This leads to incorrect form and bad habits. Always follow the rules and regulations of the gym and respect your fellow members.
5. It is very important to check with your physician first before starting any physical activity to make sure that you are for the most part healthy. Maintain a healthy lifestyle, eat healthy, and drink lots of water.

Punches

There are three basic punches—jab, cross, and hook—and though they may look easy when boxers do them on TV, they are not. Timing, balance, and practice are crucial to connect on these shots.

From the fighting stance position, I did a half step forward and threw a left punch in the air. I did the drill a lot of times and Cuki would often remind me to step forward and keep my right hand up, with the finger pocket of the glove covering the right side of my face (between the cheek and chin). Going for a small step before throwing a jab instead of just swinging and using your arms and shoulder gives the punch more power. It is also better to practice the jab and other punches using a punching bag to test the power of your shot.

Cuki also noticed that I swing my head too much when making a punch so he told me to imagine a glass of water on top of my head that I shouldn't spill. That meant I must not sway my head too much when throwing a punch.

Next up was the cross, using my right hand for a straight line punch with my rear shoulder moving forward, just touching the outside of the chin and my lead hand (left) protecting my face. Cuki also told me to rotate my torso and hips counter-clockwise as I go for the cross, as it gives the punch more power. He also reminded me to return to the fighting position after each cross, so timing and focus are needed, as one precious second would give an opponent an opportunity for a counter attack.

Saving the best for last, Cuki taught me the hook, which is mostly aimed at an opponent's chin, but can also be a very effective shot when thrown against a body. It is bit difficult to learn for a novice but, once mastered, a fighter will have knockout power. Again, timing, balance, and repetition are important.

From my fighting stance, I twisted my right hip and torso a bit and then swung my left arm, which was bent at an angle around 90 degrees in a horizontal arc toward my "imaginary" opponent. For the nth time, Cuki reminded me to keep my other hand up after throwing a punch.

Footwork

I had ankle problems before so I dreaded the footwork session the most. However, except for pivot issues, I was injury-free when Cuki was done teaching me the 12 o'clock, 3 o'clock, 6 o'clock, 9 o'clock, and 10-4 position. These feet movements are used to elude an opponent's shots and counter attack.

The 12 o'clock is the fighting stance with the left or lead foot pointing at the "imaginary" clock and hands up. The left or lead foot is also the pivot foot, and just like in bas-

ketball, Cuki said the pivot foot should stay put to avoid a traveling violation. In boxing, the pivot foot must remain in place to keep your balance.

For the 3 o'clock, my right foot took a step backward and the left is pointed at 3. I did the same backward steps and the pivot foot pointing to 6, 9, and then 12 again. The exercise lasted about three minutes and, though Cuki was occasionally looking at the grappling exhibition on the other mat, he knew my pivot foot was moving as I struggled to keep my balance at every turn.

And the 10-4? It is somewhat similar to a waltz step—forward and backward. In a fighting stance, my left foot moves forward, with my head simultaneously lunged slightly as if I was avoiding a branch of a tree (I went under Cuki's arm to get this exercise right). After the forward step, I quickly stepped backward and Cuki said that's the right time to counter punch after eluding the opponent's shot.

Speed bag

When Cuki asked me if there's any equipment I wanted to try, I pointed to a small, air-filled red bag—the speed bag—which helps a fighter keep his hands up (my problem throughout the session) and improves balance and eye-hand coordination. Cuki showed me how to punch the speed bag, at first slowly and then speeding up until his hands were a blur, the way I would see Manny Pacquiao in a video of one of his training sessions. Cuki made it look easy.

Was it really that easy? No.

I missed my first punch, and so did the second one. It was an exercise in futility at first until Cuki noticed that the bag was positioned too high for me. The belly of the bag should be at the level of my chin or mouth. The height of the bag was adjusted and I was soon hitting my target, just one punch at a time and using only my right hand, with Cuki telling me to use the side of my little finger near the first knuckle to make contact with the bag in an upward motion.

Cuki also reminded me to check the distance between my face and the bag because if I get too close to it, the rebound after a punch will hit me.

WHAT BOXING DOES TO YOU

1. It keeps you physically fit and helps you maintain a healthy lifestyle.
2. It teaches you discipline and humility and releases stress.
3. It helps your self-esteem and builds confidence.
4. There is a great sense of camaraderie when training in our Boxersize Fitness Class and we always push each other everyday.

Pad work

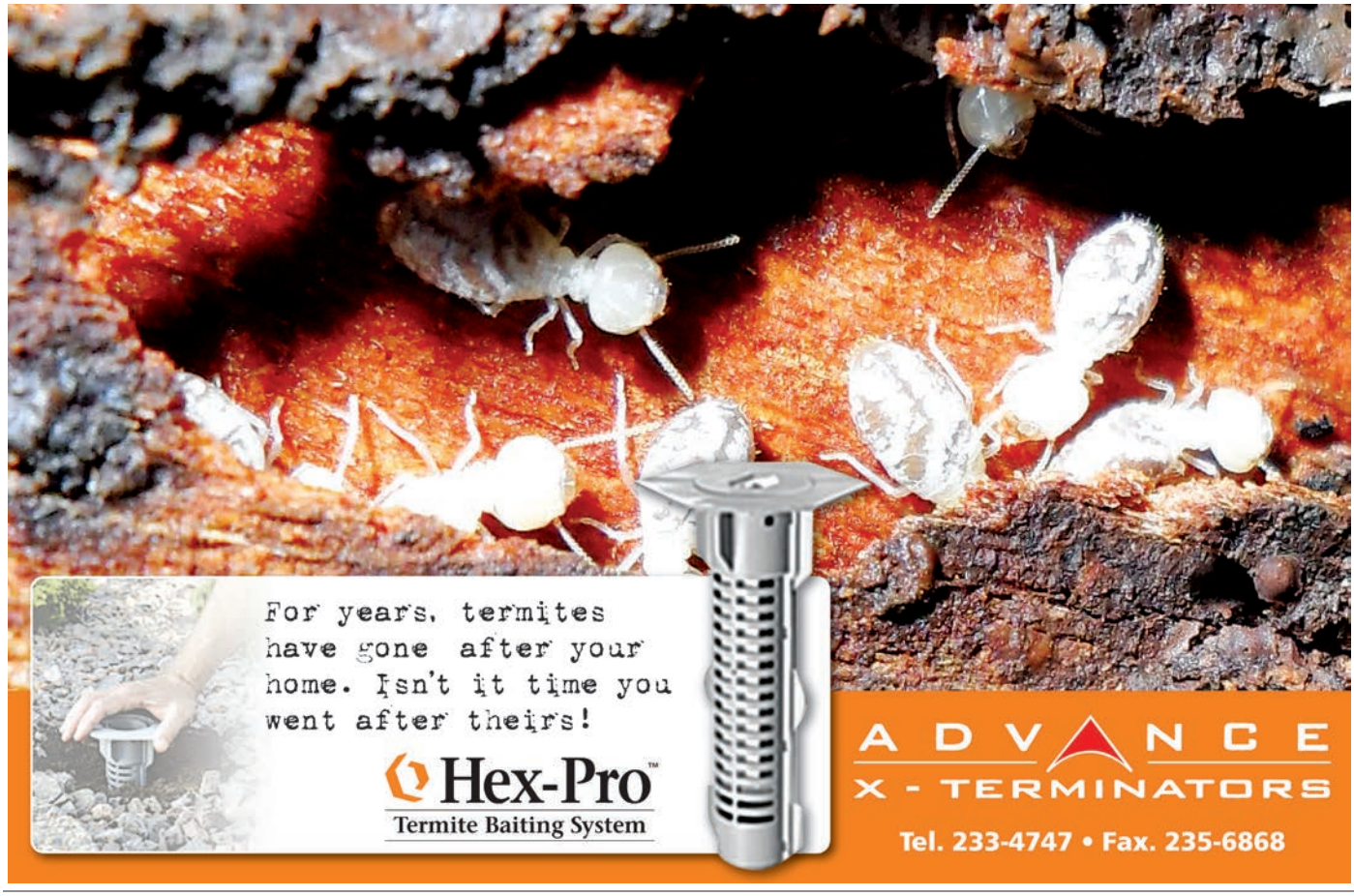
Now equipped with the basics of the three punches and footwork, it was time for the pad work or "focus mitts." I wore a black headgear and mouthpiece for this. While the head protection felt just right, the mouth guard made me uneasy (memories of my weeklong honeymoon with dental retainers flashed back). The mouthpiece Cuki gave me needed to be soaked in hot and cold water first so it would fit inside my mouth, so it was really bulging.

While I was trying to get comfortable with the mouthpiece, Cuki picked up a pair of mitts (a padded target attached to a glove) and soon he was shouting at me, asking for jabs, cross, and hooks or combinations of two or three punches on the round target.

Modesty aside, I began unleashing strong punches as Cuki egged me on. I was having an adrenaline rush. After several minutes of pad work, I was exhausted and my hands were hurting a bit as they are used to touching keyboards, not punching padded yet hard targets.

Though taxing, pad work is essential as it mirrors the action in actual fights, giving a boxer time to practice the shots/combinations he may use in a bout.

The pad work was my last workout for the night. With my shirt soaked in sweat, I thanked Cuki and his crew and promised to be back for another round.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Taking the mystery out of windsurfing

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

You see them almost everyday, gliding down the Saipan Lagoon like giant waterborne kites, their colorful sails vivid against periwinkle blue skies. Windsurfing may not be as popular as baseball in the Commonwealth but it has its adherents and supporters.

Ono Harumitsu, the owner of Marine Sports Club, is such a one, having provided windsurfing and a host of other water sports activities on Saipan for over 15 years. I figured that, if anyone can show me the ropes of windsurfing, it would be Harumitsu, who opened the Marine Sports Club in 1996.

I stopped by Harumitsu's beach stand at the Hyatt Regency Saipan last month to get a better idea of what it takes to glide up and down the Micro Beach coastline.

Harumitsu offers first-time lessons to locals for $35, which includes an hour of usage time; after picking up some tips from the seasoned pro, local patrons can rent the equipment at a $10 hourly rate. However, learning the ropes from square one can be more time consuming than one would initially guess.

During my visit I was fortunate to come across 12-year-old Masaki Kitami, who was enjoying the afternoon with some middle-aged family members and was surprised to learn that the non-competitive leisure sport appeals to all ages.

Kitami has been windsurfing for about a year and was eager to show me his skills. According to the young up-and-comer, balance

JESSIE PAGSINOHIN

is the key and, once you get the hang of riding with the wind, a few tricks can be worked in your runs such as carving, jumps, and spinning maneuvers.

Harumitsu stocks Da Kine equipment, a well known brand out of Hawaii that manufactures top-of-the-line surfing, skateboarding, and even snowboarding gear.

He says that after an introductory lesson, becoming comfortable controlling each board's universal joint steering mechanism can take all day (5-10 hours), depending on the student.

In addition to balance, the rider's core stability, along with a basic concept of sailing, are some other key factors in learning how to windsurf.

"As the wind pushes the sail one way, a rider must use his or her weight to anchor them in the opposite direction. After a while certain muscle-memory actions will develop as the rider gets the hang of it. It's important not to panic when the wind grabs a hold of the sail. Instead, try to hold your balance and go with the wind. The board and sail won't seem so heavy if you sort of go with the flow instead of fighting both it and the wind," explained Harumitsu.

A short history

Windsurfing was created in the mid-1960's, but the equipment has been innovated greatly over the years.

Though it is considered a non-competitive sport, there are a few known organized ventures such as Formula Windsurfing, freestyle, speed sailing, slalom, course racing and super-X , which is a mix between slalom and freestyle windsurfing.

Windsurfing was recognized as an Olympic sport in 1984, but then endured a drastic decline in the '90s because of licensing battles due to the equipment becoming much more specialized. However, upon the entrance of some new beginner-friendly designs the sport has benefitted from a modest revival.

A new, more extreme hobby sport known as kite surfing emerged in the 2000s, which has also taken some wind out of windsurfing's sail.

Kite surfing

Kite surfing is perhaps the new craze in regards to water surface sports nowadays but it is much more technical, dangerous, and expensive than traditional windsurfing.

In kite surfing, the riders harness the power of the wind with a steerable power kite that propels the rider who remains on top of the surface with a board similar to a wakeboard or surfboard.

Kite surfers also routinely suit up with protective clothing and some even tote parachutes, which are used to ease their fall during crash landings.

According to International Kiteboarding Association and International Class Association of the International Sailing Federation estimates, there are about 1.5 million kite surfing enthusiasts worldwide, of which a small group of active free rider-type kite surfers on Saipan are included.

They are commonly seen around this time of the year gilding through the air along the Micro Beach coastline.

Harumitsu is also a kite surfer and used to offer lessons in the past, but has steered away as offering the service simply entailed too many liabilities from a safety standpoint.

Though more risky, kite surfing tricks are very impressive. Some tricks include body dragging, boosting, grabbing air time, and even being lifted up tens of meters high for Big Air spells, among a plethora of other terms and moves.

Only the most committed water sport hobbyists take up kite surfing because of all of the barriers of entry into the sport.

In addition to windsurfing, the Marine Sports Club also offers kayaking, snorkeling, parasailing, paddle boarding, jet skiing, sea walks, introductory diving courses, banana boat rides, boat cruises, boat charters, commute trips to Mañagaha, and even deep sea trolling tours.

The beach stand is open daily from 9am to 5pm. For more information call Hyatt Regency Saipan at 234-1234 Ext. 5708. TS

ROBERT GUERRERO

2-time LLWS umpire

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Saipan Little League Baseball, Inc. chief umpire Robert Guerrero works in his second appearance in the Little League Baseball World Series big division tournament held in Easely, South Carolina last August.

WALTER CEPEDA SUTHERLAND

TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Saipan Little League Baseball, Inc. chief umpire Robert Guerrero just returned from his second appearance in the renowned Little League Baseball World Series, where he represented the CNMI as an adjudicator for the big division tournament held in Easely, South Carolina.

The big division features youth players ranging from ages 15 to 18.

Guerrero got the opportunity after being appointed by Little League Baseball headquarters, stationed in Williamsport, PA, after being endorsed by both the CNMI District and Asia-Pacific Regional boards of directors.

Being selected just once to serve as an elite-level umpire is an impressive feat in itself, so Guerrero is rightfully proud to have twice received the honor.

Guerrero's first experience came in 2009 when he suited up to mediate the LLWS senior division (14 to 17-year-olds) tournament, which is traditionally held in Bangor, Maine.

"Umpiring in the Big League [LLWS] level was much different than the senior division. We were held to very high standards during the Big League games and the officials kept a watchful eye on all of us during virtually every play. We were evaluated and critiqued thoroughly and our performance directly affected where they placed us in the next game. I even heard stories that some umpires have been sent home before in the past before the competition even finished."

There were four umpires required for each game in the tourney, and being chosen as the home plate umpire is considered high praise.

Guerrero called four games with the mask out of nine or 10 assignments, according to him. The average is two.

In describing the players, Guerrero said, "With the big leaguers at that age where they are becoming young adults, I initially presumed that there would be instances where they may act out or get rowdy, but I must admit that, overall, the players were more disciplined that I expected."

He also attested that all of the big division's competing squads performed well across the board in regards to talent and game strategy, just as the senior players back in 2009.

"The repeat qualifiers are all very strong teams, but I was just impressed with the play of the groups from international regions who have gained great strides in developing their younger programs such as Italy and India," said Guerrero.

Being a former catcher in his playing days, the eight-year army veteran is comfortable behind the plate where being dinged by a few hardballs is a regular occurrence. He also confessed that he simply does not have the patience to be a coach and that the thought of umpiring has always better suited his temperament.

Guerrero is revered sort of like a sheriff on the field because of his cool, calm, and collected demeanor.

"I get pumped up before every game, but not to draw attention to myself [but] rather to help get the players focused. In fact, I try to draw the least attention to myself as possible because the kids playing the game are the real show. You also have to have thick skin because coaches and the crowd can be pretty aggressive at times. I don't mind loud cheering from the grandstand as long as it doesn't turn ugly. Fortunately I have never even had to threaten to remove unruly fans, but I don't tolerate profanity or anything else that would negatively affect good sportsmanship on the field," he said.

Naturally, Guerrero knows how to perform his duties from anywhere on the field, but calling the balls and strikes is by far what he finds most enjoyable.

"The hardest part about being an umpire, to me, is being out in the sun and heat for long periods of time," he quipped.

Beating the heat was also a challenge during his duties stateside, Guerrero said, but they all got through, it thanks to frequent water breaks.

Guerrero has been involved in the SLL program for over 18 years and is also a certified Baseball of Oceania umpire who called some baseball and women's fast-pitch softball matches in the 2006 Micronesian Games on Saipan.

He shows no signs of easing his passion for umpiring and plans to remain involved to help develop the program, even though his son, Nathan, recently graduated from the youth plane this past season.

"I truly enjoy volunteering as an umpire and keep coming back every year because of the kids—the payment I receive really comes from them. I can't tell you how good it makes me feel when those little major division (8 to 12-years-old) players come up to me and ask me to call their games over on Miguel 'Tan Ge' Ballfield."

Happy New Year to the CNMI sports community!
Wishing that 2013 will bring you more luck on all your
sporting endeavors and activities!
We also support your efforts to make the Commonwealth healthier
and more competitively organized in the new year.

Biba to all athletes!

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